

In Koch Deal, FSU's Academic Integrity Questioned | Florida Center for Investigative Reporting

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Bruce Benson, the chair of Florida State University's economics department, doesn't object to donor control over the hiring of professors. (Photo courtesy of Florida State University.)

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Florida Center for Investigative Reporting

The flashing lights, bells and whistles should be going off for Florida State alumni, students and prospective students, as well as any Floridian not already worried about the future of higher education in this state:

FSU's academic integrity is under attack.

The notorious Koch Brothers have their hands on your school.

The [St. Petersburg Times](#) reports that, in exchange for \$1.5 million — pocket change for an institution such as FSU, whose [annual budget is \\$1.1 billion](#) — the Koch brothers have wrested the right to hire college professors. Professors, of course, who kowtow to their political views.

The Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation negotiated a deal in 2008 to give the economics department \$1.5 million, and in return it would have final say over which professorial candidates should be hired.

Just in case you wonder whether this is an acceptable arrangement, the *Times* asked Jennifer Washburn, who in researching her book *University Inc.* examined dozens of relationships between donors and universities.

"This is an egregious example of a public university being willing to sell itself for next to nothing," Washburn told the *Times*.

With interests in oil pipelines and refineries, lumber and products such as Brawny paper towels, Dixie cups, Stainmaster carpets and Lycra, Charles and his brother David have amassed fortunes surpassed in the United States only by Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. Each brother is worth \$22 billion.

And they've [used that money to shape the political agenda](#) in this country.

They're behind Americans for Prosperity, which has fueled the tea party movement, and started the conservative Cato Institute.

They have their hooks in the U.S. Supreme Court — they [hosted Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas](#) at a political strategizing session — and too many politicians to mention individually, among them Florida Sen. Marco Rubio. [Koch Industries gave Rubio \\$32,000](#) last campaign — the most any U.S. Senate candidate received from the company.

Charles Lewis, the founder of the Center for Public Integrity, a nonpartisan watchdog group, told *The New Yorker* magazine: "[The Kochs are on a whole different level](#). There's no one else who has spent this much money. The sheer dimension of it is what sets them apart. They have a pattern of lawbreaking, political manipulation, and obfuscation. I've been in Washington since Watergate, and I've never seen anything like it. They are the Standard Oil of our times."

It's because of folks like the Kochs that we've come to accept that money controls politics.

Now they're going after academia.

According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, the Koch Foundation worked out similar fund-to-control donation arrangements with Clemson University and West Virginia University.

The intrusion of the Koch brothers' special-interest money into universities, particularly during these times of economic duress, is a deeply troubling development.

If other institutions avail themselves of similar arrangements — with both left- and right-leaning groups — might we see the Balkanization of universities, with partisanship overwhelming the educational process? MSNBC versus Fox News education?

What's just as disturbing as Koch's heavy-handed move into academia is that David W. Rasmussen, dean of FSU's College of Social Sciences, and Bruce Benson, chair of FSU's economics department, don't have a problem with having a donor control the hiring of professors based on political leanings.

Rasmussen is just happy to have eight more classes covered. It's all about numbers. Benson, a self-described disciple of the Koch philosophy, says the arrangement guarantees a diversity of opinion on campus.

Uh, excuse me, professor. But shouldn't making sure there's a diversity of views in your professorial ranks be *your* job — and Dr. Rasmussen's — rather than the responsibility of some big-pocketed donor?

Be concerned, 'Noles. Be very concerned.